



Parents' ethnic identification, attitudes, beliefs and behavior about cultural differences in international transracial adoption

Tufts University Adoption and Development Project

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Background

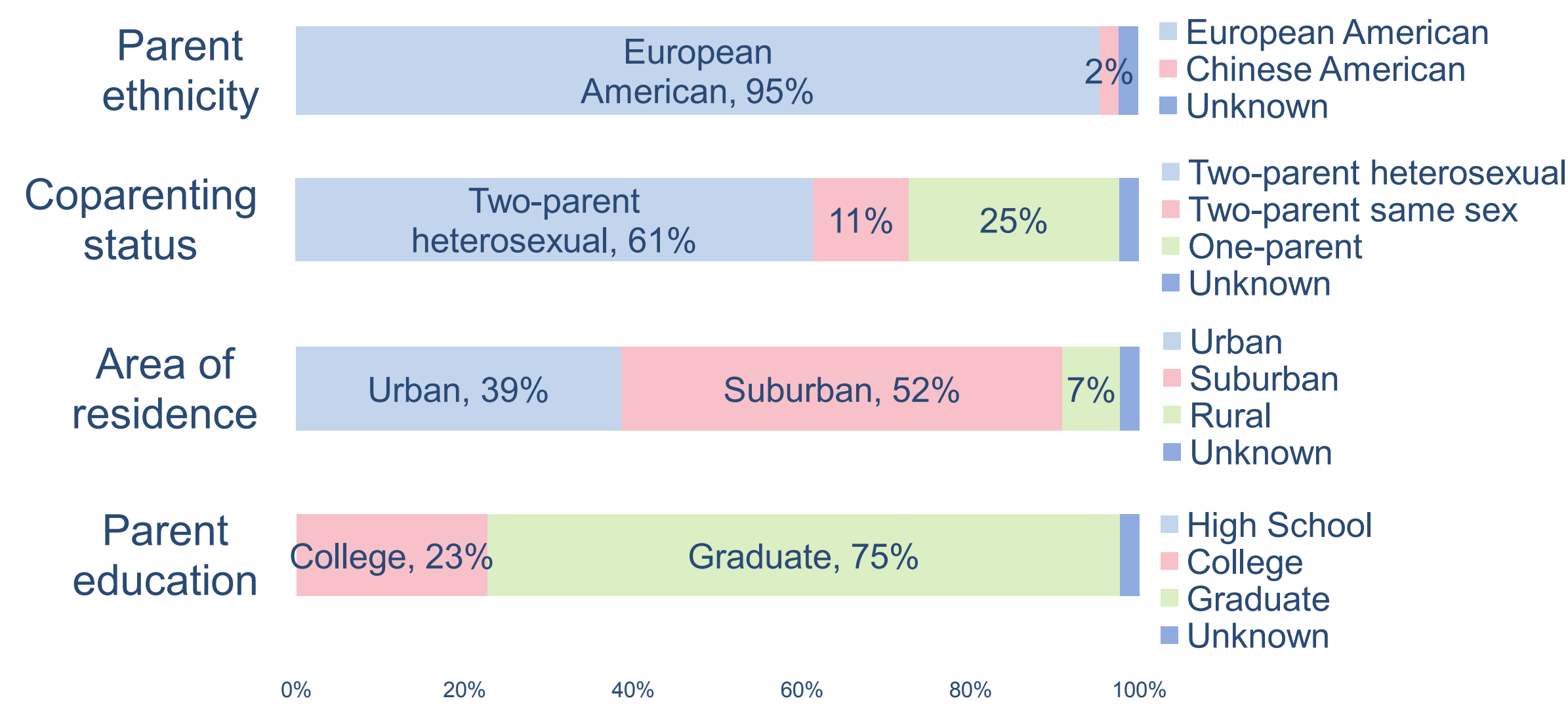
- In transracial adoption (TRA), cultural socialization (CS) practices make an important contribution to adoptees' positive adjustment (Mohanty, Keoske & Sales, 2007)
- Recent research has moved deeper to explore how parents' beliefs and attitudes about cultural differences might affect their engagement in cultural socialization practices (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011, Redington, 2011).

Research Question

- Do parents labeling their family of origin or adoptive family as multi-ethnic:
 - acknowledge cultural or racial differences more;
 - have higher bicultural sensitivity or greater adoption satisfaction;
 - provide a greater variety of cultural socialization activities
 - have children more likely to label themselves as bi-ethnic than parents who label their families as mono-ethnic?

Method: Participants

- Community sample (New England) of 44 families with children adopted from China.
- Parent mean age 51 years; child mean age 7.2 years.



Independent Variables*

Family of Origin Ethnic Background (FOEB)
(mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic)

Family of Origin Ethnic Label (FOEL)
(mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic)

Adopted Family Ethnic Label (AFEL)
(mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic)

Quantitative Dependent Variables

Satisfaction with Adoption (ASQ)
(Adoption Satisfaction Questionnaire**)

Bicultural Sensitivity (TAPS)
(Transracial Adoptive Parenting Scale†)

Variety of CS Activities
(checklist of possible activities)

Qualitative Dependent Variables*

Parent Acknowledgement of Cultural Differences
(low, mixed or high)

Parent Acknowledgement of Racial Differences
(low, mixed or high)

Child's Ethnic Self-label
(bi-ethnic, American, Chinese or other)

* From interviews; ** Pinderhughes, 1996; † Massatti et al., 2004

Results

Descriptives

	N (%) mono-ethnic	N (%) multi-ethnic
Family of Origin Ethnic Background	3 (7%)	41 (93%)
Family of Origin Ethnic Label	23 (52%)	21 (48%)
Adoptive Family Ethnic Label	8 (19%)	35 (81%)

	Mean	Std Dev
TAPS (N=35)	4.72	0.70
ASQ (N=34)	1.22	0.28
Variety of CS Activities (N=40)	7.20	2.34

	N (%) for subgroups			
Cultural Acknowledgement	5 (11%) low	7 (16%) mixed	32 (73%) high	
Racial Acknowledgement	7 (16%) low	10 (23%) mixed	27 (61%) high	
Child's Ethnic Self-label	23 (52%) bi-ethnic	5 (11%) mono-American	11 (25%) mono-Chinese	5 (11%) other

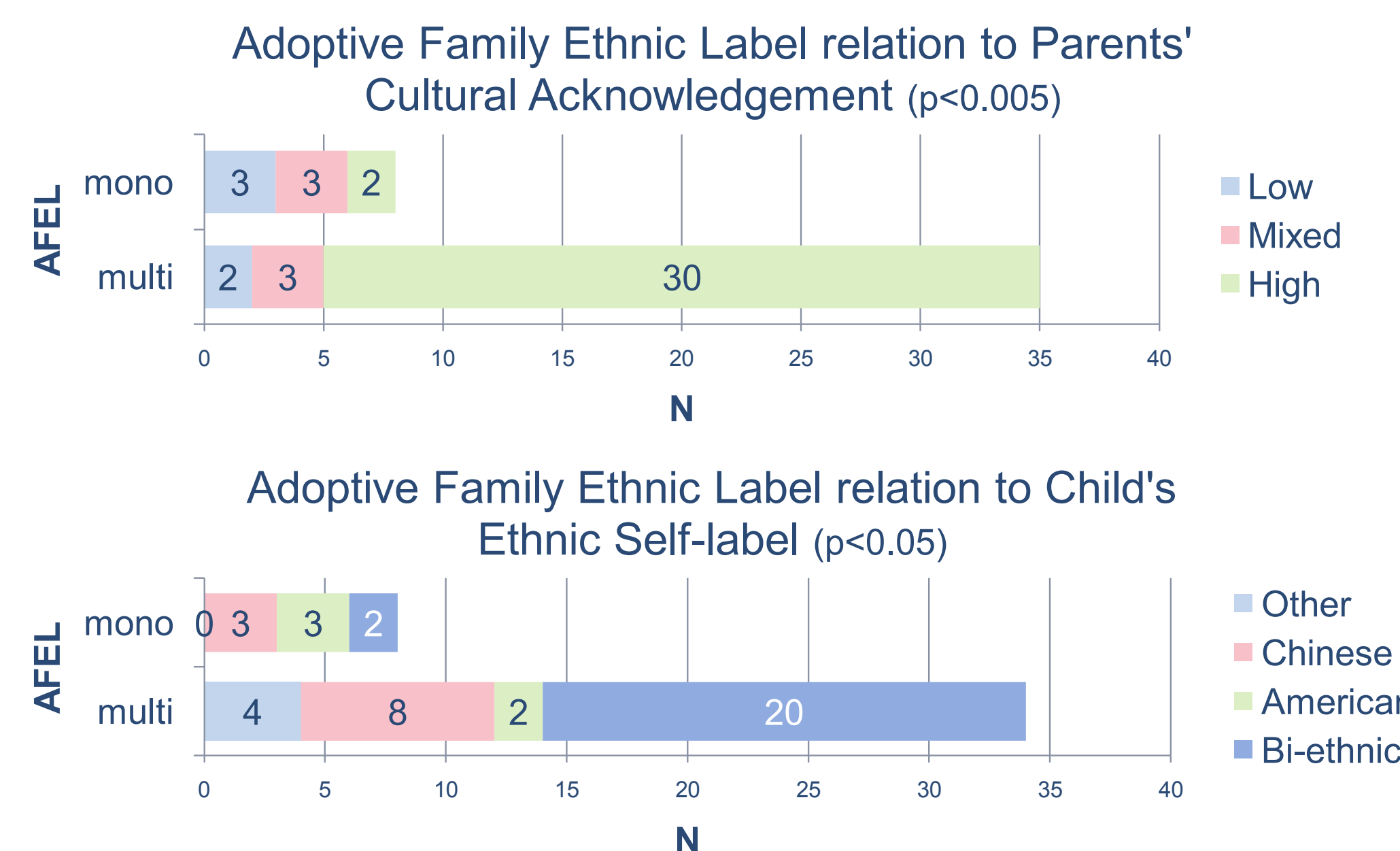
Family Labels and Quantitative Measures

	ASQ (4-point Likert scale)	TAPS (6-point Likert scale)	Variety of CS activities (up to 14 activity types)
Family of Origin Ethnic Background			
Mono (N=3, 7%)	1.28	4.86	8.33
Multi (N=41, 93%)	1.21	4.71	7.11
Family of Origin Ethnic Label			
Mono (N=23, 52%)	1.15	4.52	6.52
Multi (N=21, 48%)	1.27	4.95	7.95
Adoptive Family Ethnic Label			
Mono (N=8, 19%)	1.16	3.78	4.86
Multi (N=35, 81%)	1.23	4.94	7.72

Parents who label their adoptive family as multi-ethnic are likely to have higher bicultural sensitivity and provide a greater variety of cultural socialization activities.

p<0.05 ; p<0.06

Family Labels and Qualitative Measures



Parents who label their adoptive family as multi-ethnic are more likely to highly acknowledge cultural differences and their children are more likely to ethnically self-label as bi-ethnic.

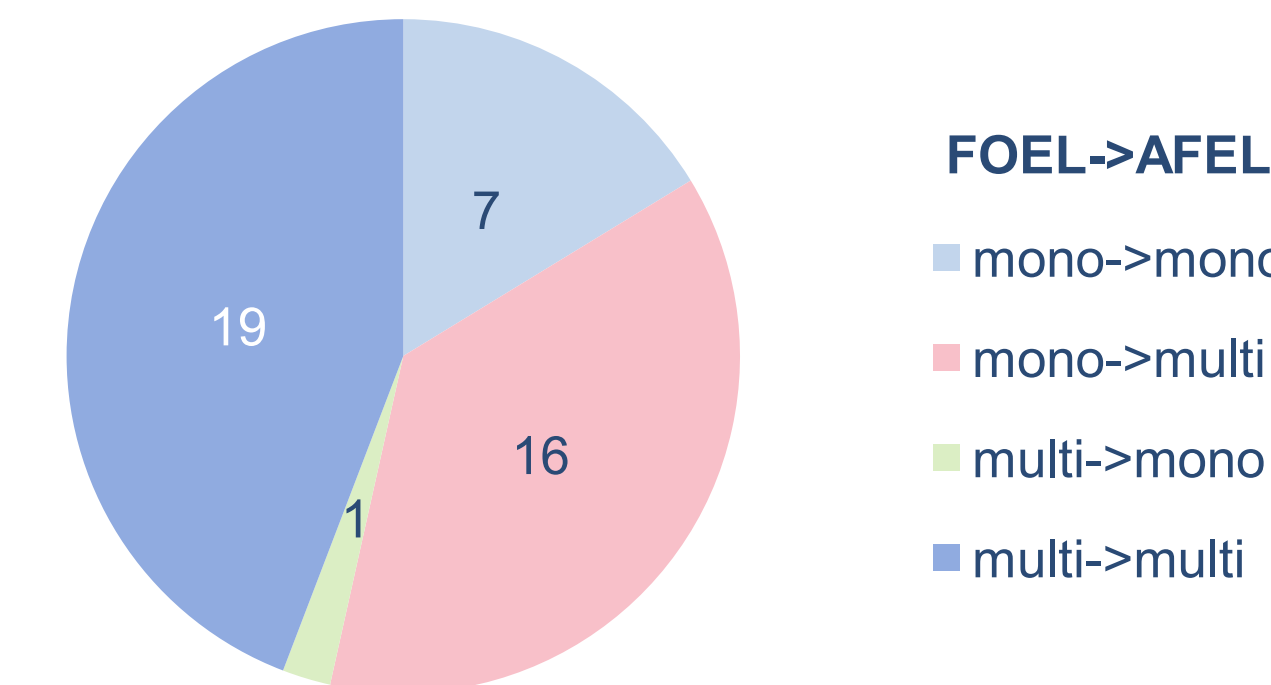
- No significant relation was found between adoptive family ethnic label and parents' racial acknowledgement.

- No significant relation was found between parents' family of origin ethnic background or label and any qualitative measures.

- Post-hoc analyses reveal:

- Just over half parents label their family of origin as mono-ethnic
- Of these, 30% label their adoptive family mono-ethnic and 70% label it multi-ethnic.
- 95% parents with multi-ethnic FOEL also label their adoptive family multi-ethnic.

Relation Between Family of Origin Ethnic Label and Adoptive Family Ethnic Label (p<0.05)



Examples of family labels

Family of Origin Ethnic Background and Ethnic Label

- "Entirely um, Anglo. Uh, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant." (mono-ethnic background, mono-ethnic label)
- "Well honestly speaking, I mean we are Irish German American in terms of ethnic roads. It goes back five generations built on the Irish and German side...I usually describe it as Anglo or Caucasian broadly but I might say Irish American—but that isn't really true when it goes back that far you know: if you say Irish American it means first or second generation I think. The words we fly around with are whites, Anglo, Caucasian. (multi-ethnic background, mono-ethnic label)
- "I'm from the Midwest, but my background is um...Irish-German. We tend to emphasize the Irish and not the German...so I would have said we were Irish-German-American." (multi-ethnic background, multi-ethnic label)
- "we talk about our family as multi-cultural. My husband has a bit of Cherokee in him. His mother is a quarter Native American. His dad was Italian and both of my parents are Italian." (multi-ethnic background, multi-ethnic label)

Adoptive Family Ethnic Label

- "American" (mono-ethnic)
- "If someone was asking me about my family, I'd say 'Oh, I have a six-and-a-half year-old daughter and she's from China, we adopted her a few years ago.' That's sort of to set the stage. But...in terms of the three of us, I look at it...as an American family" (mono-ethnic)
- "Like Irish, Chinese, English American. I mean I guess it's American—you know, America's changing—I mean it's much more diverse...I recognize us as a multicultural family. And that's how we'd say it." (multi-ethnic)
- "I feel, I mean, it's, I feel that our family through [child], in some ways, I mean I can't say that [other parent] and I are Chinese-American, but I feel that we are. I feel that our family is bi-racial now....I'm very, very aware that we're White parents because of ...our White privilege which she has to deal with all of that stuff. At the same time, I'm incorporating all of her background. We are. You know? So, I don't know how I would describe us...We're a family in the process of discovering who we are." (multi-ethnic)
- "Well, if someone came up to me on the street I would wonder why they're asking me that question. But if, you know, somebody asks me to describe my family, I would say that we're a Chinese-American-Jewish family." (multi-ethnic)

Discussion

- Adoptive family ethnic label is important. "Multi-ethnic" adoptive families, compared to "mono-ethnic" adoptive families:
 - Acknowledge cultural differences more (but not race differences)
 - Show higher levels of bicultural sensitivity (but not more adoption satisfaction)
 - Provide greater variety of cultural socialization activities
 - Are more likely to have children who self-label "bi-ethnic".
- Family of origin ethnic background/label not related to cultural socialization. Possible reasons:
 - Variety of ethnic background experiences and complex influences of multiple factors on parents' attitudes/behaviors.
 - Ambiguity of language (e.g. "American" used to mean either European ancestry or melting pot of ethnicities).
 - Impact of evolving experiences over time of raising child of color.
- But note that Berbery & O'Brien (2011) found that beliefs contributed beyond identity status to cultural socialization.
- Family of origin ethnic label: intriguing relation to adoptive family ethnic label
 - Mono-ethnic families of origin – 70% identify adoptive family as multiethnic
 - What are the processes that lead these families (and not others) to self-identify as multiethnic?

Limitations

- Representativeness of sample:
 - Participants all from Southern New England.
 - Recruitment may have under-represented families who do not value cultural socialization or transracial adoptive community connections.
- Data collection:
 - Semi-structured nature of interview leaves variation in wording of questions and follow-up discussion
- Cross-sectional study:
 - A longitudinal study would offer insight into temporal direction of relations.

Implications

- For practitioners:
 - Multicultural family of origin background may not prepare parents better to support their children in cultural socialization. Focus on identity and beliefs.
 - Some families may find TRA a greater adjustment to their ethnic identity than others.
 - When working to support child's ethnic identity, explore family ethnic identity and how that may have changed/not changed as important context for child.
- For researchers:
 - Importance of specificity of language re culture, ethnicity, race and labels in interview questions and questionnaires, instructing participants and interpreting their responses.
 - Further work required, particularly longitudinal studies, to investigate the complex influences on attitudes to cultural differences for TRA parents, (e.g. whether the salience of parents' ethnic background or their experience of being a minority are predictive of their attitudes to cultural difference).

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